



Alberta NORTH



- The Secret North?
- Profiles on Pioneers
- Things to Do and See
- Story Page



Vol. 1, No. 1

June, 1987

Contents



Dear Reader:

Let me introduce you to Alberta's North - a land of contrasts, a land of growth, a land of beauty.

Although 250,000 people (10% of our province's population) live in northern Alberta, many Albertans have never visited there and many more do not have a true picture about this part of their province.

No single description of Alberta's North exists, for it is a land of contrasts - a mixture of forest, prairie, wetlands and hills. Contrast also characterizes our industry, our settlements and our people.

For example, both the oldest and the newest settlements in Alberta are in the North. Both wilderness and modern cities can be found here. While professionals like doctors and petroleum engineers work in the North, so do trappers and homesteaders.

The Northern Alberta Development Council is a body of 10 members - ordinary northerners - who are concerned about the general lack of knowledge among Albertans about their own North. For that reason, the Council has decided to publish this magazine - so that you can read about the things there are to do and see in northern Alberta, and so you can find out about the exciting history of the North and the vibrant future of northerners.

You are holding our very first issue in your hands as you read this - our maiden issue. Please help us to make *Alberta North* a magazine that appeals to you.

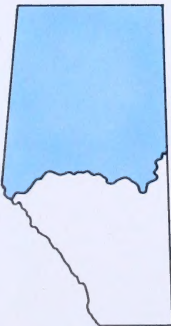
We want your letters. We want to know if the stories are interesting and helpful. We want to hear your ideas about future stories. Any ideas about topics and people who are interesting will be welcomed by us. This is your magazine and you can help make it worthwhile.

Join in our growth and excitement. Explore the North with us. And help this magazine to become your own.

Bob Elliott

Bob Elliott, MLA
Chairman

Northern Alberta Development Council



ALBERTA NORTH is published by the Northern Alberta Development Council and is distributed free for the use of junior high schools and the general public in Alberta.

Address inquiries to:
The Northern Development
Branch, 2nd Floor, Provincial
Building, 9621 - 96 Avenue,
Peace River T0H 2X0.

Canada's Best-Kept Secret -
Northern Alberta 3

The Emperor of Peace River:
Sheridan Lawrence 4

Daughter of the Trail:
Isabelle Little Bear 4

The People of the Spirit 5

No Leaky Canoes 6

Tammy-Jean Grows Up 7

Trivia Quiz 7

Fun Time in the North 8

Canada's Best-Kept Secret - Northern Alberta

C2
AUG 27 1987

It has often been said that northern Alberta is Canada's best-kept secret. Even other Albertans know very little about their own North.

For example, how many of the following facts did you know before you read it here?

- More than 60% of Alberta lies north of Edmonton.
- Three-quarters of Alberta's forests are in the North.
- About 250,000 people live in northern Alberta, in modern cities and towns and in vast rural areas.
- About 75% of the North is forested; 11% is cleared for agriculture; most of the remainder is water.
- Alberta's most prominent land form east of the Rockies is in the North - the Swan Hills.
- There are massive sand dunes in northern Alberta - near Wood Buffalo National Park and south of Grande Prairie.
- The Peace Country has some of the most northerly farming areas in the world.
- Currently, 70% of all oil and gas wells drilled in Alberta are in the North.
- Northern Alberta accounts for 80% of the province's recreational fishing.
- The Clear Hills iron deposits constitute the largest potential source of iron ore in western Canada.
- Oil sands deposits underlie 60000 km² of northern and eastern Alberta.

Plainly, northern Alberta has treasures untold - treasures that all Albertans should be proud to know about.

Plainly also, a region with water, forests, farms and rolling hills must be a land of variety and different landscapes.

One small part of the North, above Lake Athabasca, is part of the Canadian Shield and, there, granite and alabaster are found. This area is also the site of the largest inland delta in the world.

Our province's largest lakes are to be found in the North and there are more than 100 smaller ones as well. The Lakeland Country - in the Lac La Biche/Bonnyville area - abounds in pristine lakes.

Some of Canada's mightiest rivers flow through Alberta's North - accounting for more than 90% of Alberta's mean annual river discharge.

But, the North has even more to offer. There are hilly regions and prairies; rolling uplands and wetlands; foothills, marshes and valleys. There are rapids, waterfalls, islands and sandy beaches.

There are jets circling above Canadian Forces Base, Cold Lake; waving fields of yellow canola; huge bucketwheels at Fort McMurray; spectacular fall colors surrounding the Dunvegan historical site. And even more.

Northern Alberta has just about everything, and yet, thousands of Albertans have never been there.

The North's original settlers travelled its broad rivers and prowled its thick woods in search of two things: furs, and a northwest route to the Pacific Ocean. But, as early as 1893, we are told, wheat grown in the Peace River Country won a prize at the Chicago World Fair.

In fact, all early travellers to the North remarked upon the fine soil and the good agricultural possibilities. And it was largely farmers who became the first permanent settlers. Farmers and farming of all kinds are still important to the North.

Explorers and fur traders were also

the ones who brought the existence of the tar sands to outside attention and, today, oil and gas are extremely important to both the economy of Alberta and of Canada.

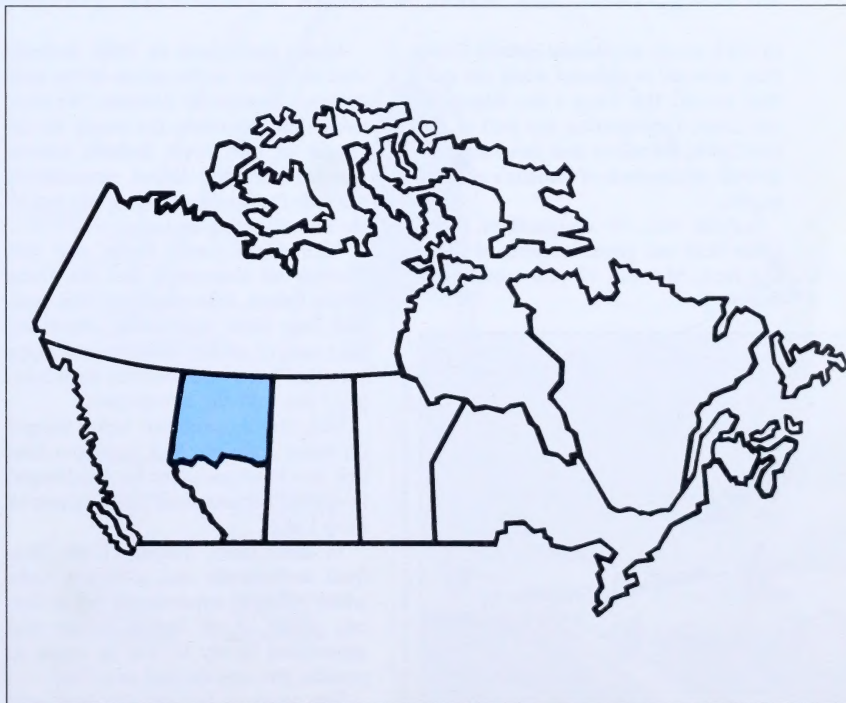
The earliest settlers did not foresee how important the forests would be but, today, they are key contributors to Alberta's economic wellbeing.

If you don't live in the North, you probably think it is a land of eternal winter. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Grande Prairie is warmer than Winnipeg - a city only 121 km from the U.S. border. The average January temperature in Edmonton is -16°. It's the same in Grande Prairie and a mere five degrees lower in Fort McMurray.

Northern summers are blessed with such long hours of daylight that crops grow and ripen in only 110 days. And, would you believe that in High Level they hold a midnight golf tournament every summer?

There's a lot about the North that you might not believe and, in reality, none of it is a secret. It's just that it's still waiting to be discovered by you and me.





ARCHIVES OF ALBERTA: Photograph Collection R2623

You could write a book about all the fascinating people who have made northern Alberta their home. One such person was Sheridan Lawrence, known far and wide as "The Emperor of Peace River."

Lawrence came to Fort Vermilion as a lad of 16 in 1886 and farmed and ranched on the Peace River there until just before the Second World War.

But he was more than a rancher. He ran the first flour mill in the Peace River Country, the first sawmill, and the first

The Emperor of Peace River: Sheridan Lawrence

privately owned store.

He was an expert riverman in the days when the river was also the highway. No one knows how many rafts and barges he built and piloted up and down the North's riverways. And no one knows how many times he poled from Peace River to Fort Vermilion and even to Fort Chipewyan, the upper Hay River and Fort Simpson.

The story is told of how he once reprimanded a careless passenger for not sitting still in the boat.

"What's wrong? Can't you swim?" the man asked flippantly.

"When I want to swim, I'll get undressed," replied Lawrence.

Lawrence opened his own store in competition with the Bay and trekked around the North bartering for furs with the Indians.

He cleared a roadway to allow the Bay to reach Little Red River and then cut logs and sawed them at his mill to help the Company build the steamboat which for years plied the Peace between Ver-

million Chutes and Hudson's Hope, B.C.

He is also credited with cutting the very first road into Hay Lakes from High Level.

With his wife Julia (Juey), he raised seven sons and eight daughters in their pioneer home - a home that became a haven to all who travelled the river.

Especially beloved by the native people, Sheridan Lawrence was called "Ooki-Mauw" or "Mitootam Ooche Eyinew," the friend of the Indian.

While maintaining until he died in 1952 at the age of 82, that the reserve system was wrong, he always employed natives and Metis on his boats, his ranch and in his mills. He spent his life teaching them the basics of farming and gardening so they might become independent.

When, in 1958, the Canadian government erected a cairn in Peace River to honor him, the natives sent money to show their own respect.

A fitting memorial to a man of immeasurable stature.

Daughter of the Trail: Isabelle (Johns) Little Bear

In 1885, a little girl named Isabelle Little Bear watched in disbelief when the shot that started the Frog Lake Massacre was fired. This uprising was part of the Northwest Rebellion and illustrated the general unhappiness of Canada's original people.

Isabelle was the daughter of Chief Little Bear and granddaughter of Chief Big Bear. She was 12 years old at the time.



ARCHIVES OF ALBERTA: Photograph Collection B.1685

Many years later in 1968, Isabelle told her story to the editor of the now defunct *Bonnyville Tribune*. We have used that interview for many of the details in this story. Isabelle (whose married name was Johns), remembered not only the uprising at Frog lake but all the events leading up to it.

"Our Chief Sweet Grass was told through an interpreter that the Great White Queen, who ruled over this land, had long arms and would, therefore, take care of all her children and make sure that none of them ever went hungry," she told the newspaper.

Still, she remembered being hungry on many occasions and recalled a long trek into Montana where her band hoped to resettle because food was so scarce in Frog Lake.

In later years, Isabelle Little Bear lived in Kehewin and in Onion Lake where relatives remembered her as fiercely proud of her Indian culture and determined to try to live as much as possible the way she had as a child.

She tried to live off the land and

bought only such staples as tea, flour or salt. She liked her tea strong and made in a can over an open fire. All summer long she lived in a tent and cooked outdoors.

She knew all the edible wild plants and used to snare small animals. Isabelle Little Bear never wasted a thing. She ate every small animal she caught, including gophers, which, she declared, were cleaner than pigs since they ate only grass. She even made her own "shampoo" from wild mint that grows in and near sloughs. She said she had used that all her life and had not lost much hair so it must be good.

She was a short woman with hands that showed many years of hard toil. She wore her grey hair in braids tied with thongs from hide she had tanned herself.

A spiritual woman who prayed daily, she believed in the traditional Indian lifestyle and advised young people not to try to live like white men.

No one is sure when she died in Onion Lake but she was probably about 100 years old at the time.

The People of the Spirit

Do you know what 'animism' is? Not many people do. It is the ancient belief that all things have souls or spirits. It was the traditional belief of the North's first people.

The first rule that the Creator gave to the native people was that they should express respect and affection and thanks to all the spirits.

It was this respect for the spirit dwelling in natural things that compelled the original northerners to take good care of the water, the forests, the animals and the land, for they believed that when people stop respecting these things and fail to offer their gratitude, all life will be destroyed.

It is said that in the old days, an Indian would apologize to the spirit of the tree he was about to fell and would explain to the tree that it was being cut down only through necessity.

The Indians also believed that the Creator gave everybody two eyes so that they would look at themselves twice and think twice before making decisions. He gave four directions to follow throughout a lifetime - honesty, kindness, faith and sharing.

Although not every Indian belonged to the same family or tribe, each different native group believed in animism. But, the different tribes had different ways of showing their respect for the supernatural and of asking for help.

For example, the Woodland Cree saw a symbolical religious or ethical purpose even in the poles and skins that formed their tipis.

Most of the bands used such things as sweetgrass and the peace pipe to indicate their respect for and devotion to the spirit world. Sweetgrass represented kindness and was burned as incense to symbolize the physical body dissolving into spirit.

The peace pipe was always more than a symbol of peace; it taught the way to conduct a good life. The rock that formed the bowl of the pipe represented faith and was heated for purification and to allow people to understand creation.

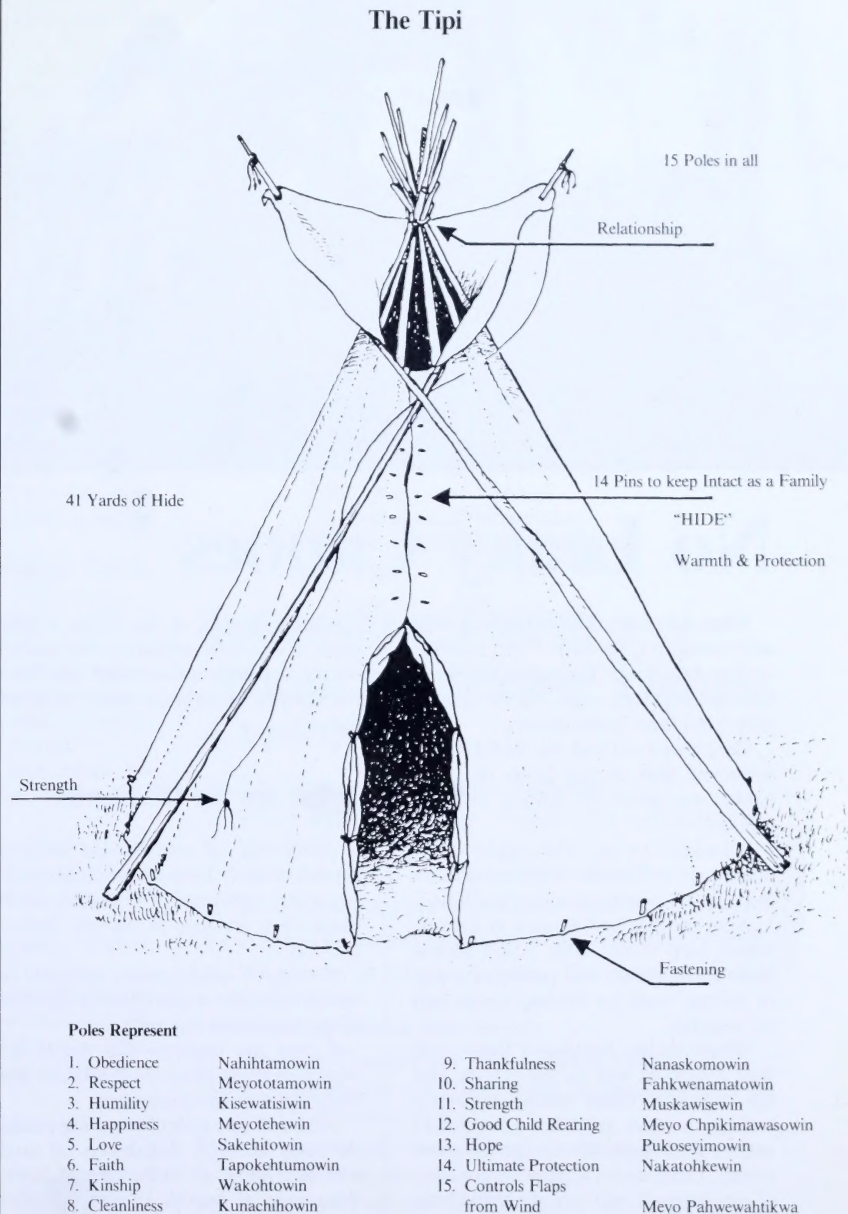
Although we have talked as though this religion is a thing of the past, today, many native people are once more turning to this ancient faith as they attempt to walk in harmony with others in this

land, and to carry out the task that the Creator gave them - to be responsible custodians of the land.

The elders of the band are the ones

who teach about spirituality as the indigenous people of Alberta's North go through a spiritual rebirth to rediscover the religion of their ancestors.

Heritage Link Magazine Picture





No Leaky Canoes

When Alexander Mackenzie and other early wanderers, like Peter Pond, paddled up the Athabasca River in their birch bark canoes, they soon learned a neat trick from their Indian guides.

They found out that the thick gummy substance that seeped from the river banks was great for sealing leaks in canoes.

It looked like tar; it acted like tar; it might very well be tar. But the explorers didn't know exactly what they had found.

Now tar was well-known in Europe where, early in the 1800s, a Scot named John L. McAdam had perfected a way of paving roads by binding stones and tar together.

Whatever the Athabasca River stuff was, it worked well on the canoes, and the explorers talked about its water-sealing qualities to other adventurers and to their superiors at the fur companies. These stories ignited the curiosity of government and private individuals alike. (The first recorded mention of the oil sand was by Wapasu - The Swan - a Native employed by the Bay.)

And so began, in the 1870s, a long series of visits from explorers who wanted to see for themselves what the Fort McMurray bituminous sands were all about.

What are the Oil Sands?

Athabasca oil sand is not really a deposit of tar. (Although tar is a naturally occurring substance, it is usually man-made of a mixture of various hydrocarbons.)

Oil sand - which occurs naturally in nature - is made of sand, clay of different kinds, water and bitumen.

It was the bitumen that made the explorers think of tar for it is sticky and black with tar-like properties.

And it is also good for paving roads. As early as 1915, Athabasca oil sand was used for road surfacing and, later, thousands of barrels of asphalt were produced from the sand.

However, most people think about oil and not about asphalt or canoes

when they think of the oil sands of Alberta.

How Much Oil in the Oil Sands?

The world's biggest oil sands are found in Canada and nearly all of that is located in Alberta's north.

There are four major fields - in the Peace River country of northwestern Alberta; in the Fort McMurray area; in the Wabasca area in the north-central part of the province and in the Cold Lake region bordering Alberta and Saskatchewan.

Geologists think these deposits are 125 (cretaceous) million years old and if we lumped the areas all together we would have a piece of land the size of New Brunswick.

There is enough oil there to supply the world for 10 years, Canada for 270 years and Alberta for 1,800 years.

But it isn't easy to mine. In fact it is a technological marvel that rescues the oil.

In a future issue of *Alberta North* we will examine the way heavy oil is lifted from the oil sands.



Tammy-Jean Grows Up

Tammy-Jean had never wanted to move away from Edmonton. In fact, when she found out that her dad had accepted a job offer in Slave Lake, she had at first refused to go.

"I'm old enough to be on my own and that's what I'm going to do! Who wants to live in the boondocks?" she had shouted.

Tammy-Jean was seventeen and in her last year of high school. She knew she would never make new friends or fit into small town living. She knew she would hate it. And she knew no one would like her.

But in the end she did go with her family.

"It's only for a year," she told herself. "Then I'll be in university and back in the city. I can stand it for a year."

Her classmates tried to make friends but Tammy-Jean was always "too busy" to be bothered with them, too "bogged down" to go where they were going or do what they were doing.

She read a lot. And she went for long walks in the woods and down the highway. Alone. She would trudge down to the lake, and sit there staring out over the water and wishing she were anywhere at all except Slave Lake, Alberta.

That's how she met the old man. He used to stare across the water too. He was also always alone. And, as the days passed, they nodded and smiled but for a long time they didn't speak.

Then, one day he said to her, "Most beautiful place in the world. The North."

She looked around her. It was indeed beautiful. A broad rippling lake, turning purple and gold beneath a setting sun. Some weathered driftwood on the white beach. Birds swooping nearby.

"Let's you get in touch with yourself," he went on. "Makes the people that live here special."

Tammy-Jean said, "I don't think they're special."

"Why not?"

She had no answer. She didn't know anyone well enough to be able to say if there was some kind of specialness about northerners or not. She hadn't given them that kind of chance.

Finally she said, "They're different from city people."

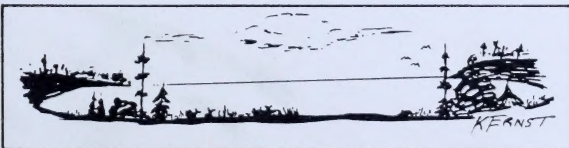
"Good different or bad different?" the old man asked. He smiled at her then and sank back into his reverie, looking over the lake again, shutting her out.

Tammy-Jean sat there for a long time, thinking about what he had said. Good different? Bad different? Which were they? Or were they different at all? She realized she didn't even know that about them.

"I never gave this town a chance," she whispered. "I never even tried to be nice or to get to know anyone."

When at last she turned her footsteps homeward, she had made up her mind to find out what her new town was like and what kind of people lived there. Maybe the old man was right. Maybe northerners and the North itself really were different.

Tammy-Jean hoped she wasn't too late.



About This Page

This page - the inside back cover - of *Alberta North* is the readers' page.

We will be happy to print stories, poems, drawings, puzzles, photography, and so on, submitted by our readers. Just remember that what you submit must be original since there are laws that protect other people's work.

Submit your work along with your name, address, grade and school to:

The Editor, *Alberta North*, The Northern Development Branch, 2nd Floor, Provincial Building, 9621 - 96 Avenue, Peace River, Alberta T0H 2X0.

The best submissions will be published and all others will be returned.

Northern Limericks

There once was a girl from St. Paul
Who grew most exceedingly tall.
"I don't mind my height,"
She confided one night,
"It's the size of my shoes that appall!"

There was a young man from Falher
Who got a punk cut for his hair.
And when he went home
And showed them his dome,
He gave both his parents a scare.

Interesting Things About Interesting Things

A Trivia Quiz

1. What is the oldest settlement in Alberta?
2. Where will you find the world's most northerly grain elevators?
3. What is the origin of the name 'Peace River'?
4. What Alberta city has the trumpeter swan for its symbol?
5. Where is the largest freshwater delta in the world located?
6. What town in Alberta is called 'The Honey Capital of Canada'?
7. What does 'Lac La Biche' mean?
8. Where are Canada's new F18 jet fighters based?
9. Can you identify five places north of Edmonton with the word 'fort' in their names?
10. Can you identify three places in northern Alberta with a bird in their names?
11. In what town will you find a university with no classrooms?
12. What city did the oil sands build?

(Answers on page 8)

Fun Time in the North

Everyone who goes North comes back home with tales of the fun times and the friendly people. This is a part of the culture of the North and something taken for granted by those lucky enough to live there.

One of the events that takes place annually is the World Championship Jet Boat Race - a fabulous race that begins in **Whitecourt** on June 28, proceeds along the Athabasca River to Hinton where boaters face an overland leg of about 60 miles, and then goes to **Grande Cache**, June 30.

But it isn't over yet! Next, the boaters race down the Smoky River to **Bison Flats** (July 1) and **Watino** (July 3) via the Smoky and Wapiti Rivers, and into **Peace River** town by way of the Smoky and Peace Rivers on July 4.



A 500-mile course on four separate rivers; speeds up to 90 miles per hour; this is a marathon in the fullest sense of the word.

You can watch the races from any point along this route but the most fun would be in Peace River when the winner speeds in.

Alberta is the jet boat racing capital of Canada and the northern race is the biggest one in the province.

Another fun-filled event is the Blueberry Festival in **Fort McMurray**. This festival, which is now in its 24th year, is three days of exciting things to do over the September long weekend.

This is the time of year when the blueberries are ripe in the Fort McMurray area and every restaurant in town features blueberry muffins and pancakes, blueberry pie and shortcake, and blueberries in every other dish you could think of.

The festival itself sponsors a pie-eating contest - blueberry pie of course. But there is more to do than merely eat.

There are golf, baseball, and soccer tournaments. There are a talent contest, dancing, a midway, a parade, a country fair.

There is a wonderful raft race which begins on Friday and ends on Sunday with a final heat.

The interesting Oil Sands Interpretive Centre is open for tours and visitors can arrange to see the Oil



Sands if they so wish.

A 3-Day Stage Bicycle Race is planned. Called the "Blueberry Classic," it is an AB Bicycle Association officially sanctioned race where points toward Association trophies can be earned. Anyone who has visited Fort McMurray will attest to the challenge bikers will face from the terrain.

The 25th Annual Pow Wow and Blue Feather Fish Derby (more than \$18,000 in prizes) takes place in **Lac La Biche**, July 31 - August 3. This is your chance to take in some of the best Indian dancing in all the west. There are also fiddling and jigging contests, a midway and a huge parade.

Of course there will be good things to eat, good camping, good boating, dancing and other country fair delights.

If you have never been to Alberta's North, this summer is the time to go.

Answers to

Interesting Things About Interesting Things

1. Fort Chipewyan and Fort Vermilion both celebrate their 200th Anniversary in 1988.
2. High Level.
3. The River was used as a division line in settling Indian wars.
4. Grande Prairie.
5. Lake Athabasca.
6. Falher.
7. Lake of the Doe.
8. Cold Lake Air Base near Grand Centre.
9. Fort Chipewyan, Fort Vermilion, Fort McKay, Fort McMurray, Fort Assiniboine, Fort Kent.
10. Pelican Mountains, Pelican Portage, Loon Lake, Owl River, White Gull, Swan Hills.
11. Athabasca.
12. Fort McMurray (grew from 1,300 people in 1964 to 35,000 in 1985).